DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 864 TM 810 280

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TITLE Local School District Planning, Evaluating and Reporting: Minnesota's Alternative to Minimum Competency Testing.
PUB DATE 30 Mar 81
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Evaluation; *Educational Assessment; Educational Objectives; Minimum Competency Testing; *State Legislation; *State School District Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Legislation dealing with competency testing in general falls into the following categories: (1) mandating uniform statewide minimum competency testing, to which high school diplomas and/or grade promotion is related; (2) mandating uniform statewide minimum competency testing to be used for improvement of instruction but not tied to grade promotion or high school diploma; (3) mandating that local districts develop their own testing programs and establish minimum standards for promotion and/or diplomas; (4) permitting local districts to establish minimum competency standards and establishing some restrictions on such standards; or (5) mandating that local districts provide annual assessment, with no requirement for minimum competency testing. In 1976, statutes were enacted in category five in Minnesota (the Planning, Evaluating and Reporting--PER--Legislation). This paper provides a description of this legislation, the results of the first two years' experience with its implementation, and a discussion of its strengths and weaknesses as opposed to minimum competency testing. Data from 1978-79 and 1979-80 reports to the Department of Education and from a 1980 survey of administrators, Board members, and citizens describe the kinds of planning, evaluating, and reporting taking place, and judgments of professionals and laymen about the process. Results show that PER has served Minnesota schools well, and provided a vechicle for constructive community participation in goal-setting and prioritizing. (Author/GK)

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Local School District Planning, Evaluating and Reporting: Minnesota's Alternative to Minimum Competency Testing

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze one state's alternative to a minimum competency testing program. At this writing, some 37 states have enacted legislation or State Boards of Education have issued rules or regulations dealing in general with competency testing (Pipho, 1978; Baughman & Chase, 1979; Gorth, 1979). These appear to fall into five general categories:

1. Mandating uniform statewide minimum competency testing, to which high school diplomas and/or grade promotion is related.

2. Mandating uniform statewide minimum competency testing to be used for improvement of instruction but not tied to grade promotion or high school diploma.

3. Mandating that local districts develop their own testing programs and establish minimum standards for promotion and/or diplomas.

4. Permitting local districts to establish minimum competency standards and establishing some restrictions on such standards.

5. Mandating that local districts provide annual assessment, with no requirement for minimum competency testing.

Minnesota's legislature in 1976 and 1979 enacted statutes in category five above. What follows is a description of this legislation, the results of the first two years' experience with its implementation, and a discussion of its strengths and weaknesses.

Minnesota's History on Minimum Competency Testing

Minnesota has 439 independent school districts (432 K-12, 2 elementary only, 2 "common" districts, 3 intermediate) with a total enrollment of approximately 756,000 students. Minneapolis, the largest district, enrolls 41,000 students; in 1978-79 there were 65 districts with fewer than 300 students and another 210 with enrollments between 300 and 999 students. Enrollment is declining in all but 42 of the state's districts; "outer ring" suburbs of Minneapolis/St. Paul and scattered areas in the northern part of the State are growing or showing less than 5% declines.

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Minnesota has a long history of strong financial support for public education. During 1978-79, nearly $1 billion of state collected revenue was spent on public elementary and secondary schools. In 1971, in what has been called the "Minnesota Miracle," state spending was increased to equalize per pupil funding across the state. Modifications in the school finance plan have allowed certain disparities to continue, and the state has attempted to remediate these through categorical aids. In 1979-80, Minnesota ranked 15th among the fifty states in per capita state and local expenditures for education (NEA, 1980).

Achievement test scores are generally above national averages. Minnesota students tend to score above national averages on National Assessment items, particularly in reading and math. While no one norm-referenced achievement test is given to all elementary students, the PSAT is widely employed at the secondary level. Minnesota students consistently score slightly higher on both math and reading portions. Since 1964, school retention rates have ranged between 86.2% and 89.5%, considerably above the national averages. Nevertheless, as in other states, public education in Minnesota has been subject to criticism; test scores have declined, and colleges and employers have complained about inadequate preparation of students.

Over the years, the local district in Minnesota has retained a high degree of autonomy. State mandates are limited to minimum instructional days and minimal required instructional hours in various subject areas. Distribution of these hours across grades is a local option. Except for licensure and disbursement of funds, the role of the Minnesota Department of Education has been one of service rather than enforcement of compliance with statutes and regulations. It is in this context of strong local autonomy and control that discussions of student performance and educational accountability have taken place. Demands from some quarters for minimum competency standards were countered by strong objections from others that such systems were impracticable and elitest. The legislature determined that "the setting of minimum standards, in whatever form, ought to be established at the local level to reflect local district concerns" (Johnson, 1978).

In the Department's effort to deal with the minimum competency issue, a "Committee of 21" citizens was established in 1977. The group recommended that 39 minimum competency standards be established for high school graduation, but suggested these be guidelines, not regulations. A subsequent State Board of Education Policy statement "encourages each local district to develop and adopt... its own plan for setting standards and establishing criteria for determining when those standards have been met" (State Board of Education, 1979).

The PER Legislation

The PER (Planning, Evaluating and Reporting) Legislation - M.S. 123.74 - 123.742, was enacted by the Minnesota Legislature in 1976. The statute recognized the state's traditional commitment to local control of education and yet also noted the importance of comprehensive planning and evaluation. An overview of the legislation is presented below:

POLICY

The legislature finds that a process for curriculum evaluation and planning is needed for continued improvement of the educational programs for all public school children in the state, and to allow for better evaluation of educational programs by local communities.

The legislature further finds that such a process is needed to facilitate decisions by school boards and communities as to which services can be best provided by the public schools and which services can or should be provided by other institutions such as the family, the private sector, or other public agencies.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY; CURRICULUM ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The school board of each local school district in the state shall develop and adopt a written education policy which establishes educational goals for the district, a process for achieving those goals and procedures for evaluating and reporting progress toward the goals. The school board shall review this policy each year and adopt revisions which it deems desirable. School boards are encouraged to develop school district policy and any revisions after consultation with the staff of each school building. A 1979 amendment encourages school boards to adopt policies regarding dropouts and the dropout prone.

The school board shall instruct the administrative and professional staff of the school district to develop an instructional plan for the purpose of implementing the goals established in the district educational policy within the resources available to the district. Insofar as possible, the instructional plan shall include measurable instructional objectives to assist in directing and measuring progress towards the goals established in the district educational policy. For goals towards which progress is not easily measurable, the instructional plan shall include other appropriate means to direct and evaluate progress.

Each school board is encouraged to appoint a curriculum advisory committee to provide for active community participation in the process of developing and revising the district's educational policy, developing the instructional plan, evaluating progress, and reporting to the public.

Each year, a final evaluation of progress shall be conducted, including both professional and consumer evaluations. The professional evaluations shall utilize test results and other performance data along with faculty interpretations and judgments. Consumer evaluation shall include the opinions of students, parents, and other residents of the community served by the school. Upon receipt of the evaluation reports, each school board shall review the results and develop appropriate school improvement plans to include the areas where goals of the district educational policy have not been met.

The district educational policy, the reports of the annual evaluation including summary test results, and the plans for school improvement shall be made available to all the citizens of the school district through media releases and other means of communicating with the public. These documents shall also be on file and available for inspection by the public. Information copies of the report shall be sent to the State Board of Education.

The law allowed for two years of preliminary planning, with full compliance required by August 30, 1979. A companion law, enacted in 1977, required local districts to establish educational goals, review projections of enrollment, staffing and revenues, review facilities and explore options for cooperation across districts and variations in organization to cope with declining enrollments and rising costs (Educational Planning Task Force, M.S. 122.86 - 122.89).

It should be noted that no sanctions were provided for in either of these pieces of legislation. Compliance was mandated, but no penalties were established for non-compliance.

Role of the Minnesota Department of Education in PER

The law stipulates that the nine regional educational cooperative service units (ECSUs) and the State Board provide any and all necessary technical assistance to local districts. This may include testing and evaluation at the request of the LEA.

The agency's first response to PER was to collect and disseminate a wide variety of material on educational goal-setting, behavioral objectives, working with community groups, testing and other forms of evaluation. The aim was maximum information in the shortest possible time. Additionally, one or more workshops were conducted for local PER representatives in each of Minnesota's nine planning regions. These focused primarily on the legal requirements of PER. During this time the department's philosophic posture was that PER was a local process, not to be interfered in. Substantive technical assistance was to come from the ECSU or other "local" sources.

In 1978, a reorganization of Minnesota's Department of Education created an internal Office of Planning and Evaluation. OPE was given responsibility to receive and review all PER reports submitted to the State Board, develop the department's plan to render technical assistance in planning and evaluation to local districts, and to be the department's liaison with the nine ECSUs.

When the first PER reports were received by the department in August, 1979, staff in the Office of Planning and Evaluation read each one, checking the contents against the mandated requirements. Because of the basic "hands - off" posture of the Agency, no assessment was made of the quality of the planning, evaluation or reporting carried out. Other information of interest to the department was collected when available (e.g, subject areas to be evaluated the following year, whether or not minimum competencies had been established). Since there was no stipulated format for reporting on the PER process, the information provided varied tremendously. A subsequent questionnaire was developed to be sent to Superintendents, School Board Members and Citizens, asking about the value of the PER process in their districts. Results of this survey are reported below.

A report prepared for the Legislature contained a summary of the extent to which requirements were met by LEA's and a summary of responses to the

questionnaire. Copies of this report were also sent to the districts. Apparently stung by the judgment that they had fallen short in compliance, district PER representatives began to request aid from the MDE. The "hands off" posture was tacitly rescinded.

Since fall of 1979, the Office of Planning and Evaluation has conducted workshops in a number of planning regions, reviewing PER requirements and assisting PER representatives to develop evaluation procedures and making suggestions about testing, reporting test scores and other evaluation results, and about using the PER process for making educational decisions. PER check lists were distributed; sessions were conducted on measuring attitudes, using norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests and consultations were given with individual school districts.

Results

Planning

Review of the PER reports was structured by a checklist of items required by the law. The informational reports from districts to the MDE followed no such format, creating considerable problems for reviewers in collecting the desired information. Data from reviews of 1979 (N = 410) and 1980 (N = 388) reports are given in Table I.

Table I

Statutory Planning Components in Local PER Reports
1979/1980

N=410, N=388

M.S. 123.74 Planning Component	Appeared to be Included		Unable to Tell	
	1979	1980	1979	1980
A written board policy	87%	74%	13%	26%
a. Educational goals	94%	72%	6%	28%
b. Process for achieving those goals	73%	56%	27%	44%
c. Procedures for evaluating progress	74%	55%	26%	45%
d. Procedures for reporting	67%	52%	33%	48%
e. Discussion of dropouts & dropout prone[1]	--	9%	--	91%

[1] Encouraged only. Added effective 1980.

In 1979, almost all (94%) districts reported having established educational goals, although not all had incorporated those goals into a formal board policy statement. Considerably smaller percentages had adopted processes for achieving the goals (73%) and procedures for evaluating progress (74%) and for reporting to their publics (67%). It appears from these data that percentages in each category declined from 1979 to 1980. Conversations with local districts following the 1980 reports indicate that the apparent decline was because many PER representatives were unaware that they were required to report these items every year. Having reported them in 1979, they did not repeat the information.

The law encourages the establishment of curriculum advisory committees to assist in carrying out PER requirements. In 1980, 75% of districts reported that they had either established such committees or added PER responsibilities to those of an existing advisory committee (or committees). As with Board policies, this figure also appears to be inaccurately low, because in 1979, 94% of districts reported having established such groups. The major activity of these committees appeared to have involved goal setting, but 20% of the groups reported being involved in specific curriculum areas, and another 21% was reported as generally assisting with the PER process. Many of these appeared to have actually prepared the PER reports to the community.

A questionnaire was sent in 1979 to each superintendent, and one school board member and one citizen in each district. Three questions dealt with the community involvement in the PER process. The questions, and grouped responses received are given in Table II. Results appear strongly positive in this area.

Table II

Citizen Involvement in PER Activities

	Supt. (N=341)	Board (N=235)	Citizen (N=331)
1. Rate the level of community involvement in curriculum planning and evaluation prior to the PER process.			
"Very high" or "good" involvement	32%	30%	22%
"Little" or "practically no" involvement	68%	69%	78%

	Supt. (N=341)	Board (N=235)	Citizen (N=331)
2. Rate the level of community involvement in curriculum planning and evaluation after implementation of the PER process.			
"Much higher" or "somewhat higher" level of involvement	78%	80%	84%
"No change" or "less involvement"	22%	20%	16%
3. Rate the impact of the community involvement in the PER process.			
"Very" or "generally" positive impact	64%	82%	70%
"No", "mixed" or "negative" impact	36%	28%	30%

That the PER Legislation increased the amount of community involvement in curriculum planning and involvement in about 80% of districts reporting is not surprising, since the law strongly recommended such involvement. A healthy majority of superintendents (64%) reported that the impact of this involvement was positive, and greater majorities of board members (82%) and citizens (70%) reported a positive impact.

A large number (approximately 50%) of the districts had used the Phi Delta Kappan educational goals and the PDK procedures for students, staff, parents, and community to rank these in order of importance and to rate the performance of the local district with respect to these goals. This resulted in rather extensive lists of goals. To cope with numerious goals, OPE staff encouraged districts to establish some kind of evaluation cycle.

Evaluation

Encouraging local districts to develop and employ procedures for evaluating progress toward goal attainment was clearly a major focus of PER. Our data indicate the process has, in fact, encouraged local districts to complete and report evaluation information to their respective communities.

Evaluation Reports and Cycles. During 1979, 86% of PER reports included the results of annual evaluation procedures; by 1980 the percentage had increased slightly, to 88%. Annual 1980 evaluation procedures were part of a long-range evaluation cycle in 42% of the cases reviewed. In other words, one can conclude that evaluation has been institutionalized in a number of school districts.

These evaluation processes contained some mix of assessment approaches. However, the majority of local districts rely principally on standardized norm-referenced test data. These are dispalyed in Table III below.

Table III

Components of Local District Evaluation Reports
1979-1980

N=410, N=388

	Appeared to be Included		Unable to Tell	
1. Professional Evaluation	1979	1980	1979	1980
a. Summary Test Results	86%	83%	14%	17%
b. Other Performance Data	31%	35%	69%	65%
c. Faculty Interpretations and judgments	37%	42%	63%	58%
2. Consumer Evaluation				
a. Parent Opinions	52%	34%	48%	66%
b. Student Opinions	42%	28%	58%	72%
c. Other Community Resident Opinions	42%	21%	58%	79%

It is interesting to note that while rates of use of so-called professional measures remained relatively static from 1979 to 1980, a significant reduction in consumer evaluation appeared to occur. In 1979, 52% of reports reviewed included parent opinions of school effectiveness; in 1980 only 34% surveyed parents-an 18% reduction. Reductions of 14 and 21 percent respectively appear to have occurred in both student and non-parent community resident surveys.

Uses of Tests. As noted above, an average of 85% of reporting districts employ norm-referenced tests as the major component of local evaluation processes. Review processes attempted to extract which of these measures are employed in local districts. Table IV has these data.

Table IV

Standardized Achievement Tests In Use By Local Districts

(N=357)

Measure	Number Reporting Use*	Percent
Iowa Tests of Basic Skills/ Iowa Tests of Education Development	162	45
Stanford Achievement Test	81	23
SRA Achievement Series	39	11
Metropolitan Achievement Tests	24	7
California Achievement Tests	24	7
Other**	22	7
TOTALS	357	100

* Categories not mutually exclusive.
** Includes: TASK, CTBS, Gates-MacGinitie, etc.

In addition to a heavy reliance on standardized tests, nearly half (45%) of those districts reporting use of norm-referenced achievement measures employ the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and Educational Development.

Districts also employ other types of measures for evaluative purposes, including aptitude and/or intelligence tests and a variety of criterion-referenced measures. Of 90 reported uses of aptitude measures, 25 (28%) employed the Differential Aptitude Test. Use of criterion-referenced measures was reported in 193 cases, 158 (87%) of which were the "Piggyback" batteries of the Statewide Assessment Program. The local district assessment option (Piggyback) allows local districts to replicate the statewide Reading, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science measures for grades 4, 8 and 11 and Reading literacy measures for senior high school. Other data gathered by the Office of Planning and Evaluation have indicated 37% of the State's local districts participate in the piggyback program.

Staff reviewing local PER reports were also asked to judge whether it appeared the evaluation reports, in fact, addressed districts' progress in achieving stated goals. In a clear majority (66%) of reports so reviewed, progress toward goal attainment is documented.

As noted above, the law requires districts to develop school improvement plans based on weaknesses/strengths revealed by evaluation data. Sixty-seven percent of PER reports did include the required school improvement plan. However, slightly less than half (48%) of those plans appear to be based on evaluation findings.

Reporting

The reporting component of PER is intended primarily for parents and members of communities served by the schools. Reports are to be provided at least annually so citizens can be better informed with respect to public education. Our review indicates, however, that many districts perceived that the annual PER report was developed solely for review by the State education agency.

Therefore, a number of reports reviewed by OPE in 1980 appear not to have been made public in the local community. In 43% it was not possible to ascertain that educational policies were made available to the community; in 26% whether annual evaluation data were transmitted; and, whether or not school improvement plans had been made public in 45%.

It also appears that a substantial majority of districts complete special PER reports. Comparatively few districts make the PER reportage part of ongoing communication practices. These data are reported below.

Table V

Reporting Techniques Used By Local Districts
(N=361)

Type of Report	Number*
Special PER Report	252
Local Newspaper Article(s)	89
School Newsletter	87
Unable to tell	55
Other**	43

* Categories not mutually exclusive
** Includes: Conferences, Open Houses, Radio/TV Reports, etc.

Responses to the PER survey indicate at least the perception that the reporting to the public had positive results. Ninety percent of citizens, 85% of superintendents and 83% of board members reported that the community was "somewhat" or "definitely" more aware of the effectiveness of school programs.

Advantage and Disadvantages of PER Legislation

Advantages

For the local district, the PER legislation has several advantages over state-mandated minimum competency legislation. Most important is local decision-making about the goals of local education and the standards set. Citizens of small rural communities, prosperous suburbs, and large cities may view the mission of education quite differently, or at least may wish to emphasize different aspects of that mission. An obvious example is the teaching of agricultural courses -- not much use to the inner city student, but of major interest in many Minnesota districts. This law is flexible enough to meet a broad range of needs. Put negatively, the law prevents charges that one interest group or type of locality is imposing its standards on another. The emphasis on flexibility and local decision-making has resulted in little or no opposition to the law. Non- or incomplete compliance appears to result from local personnel turnover or from poor communication, not from opposition.

The PER law permits the establishment and evaluation of a very broad range of educational goals, probably a broader range than would be possible to address on a statewide basis. Minimum competency standards of necessity address a rather narrow range of skills and knowledge. The PER process can address all of the district's educational goals.

Citizen participation in the educational process is a strength of this law. Local schools have the benefit of communication with parents and potential employees of their students, and parents and community see educators as concerned professionals working for the good of their students. Many districts have indicated that the public relations impact of the process has benn very positive.

Some critics of minimum competency standards fear a tendency to forget the word "minimum" and make these the desired standards rather than a floor. Focusing on goals obviates this tendency.

A few of the districts in the State were already well along in setting goals and/or standards, and in evaluating student progress. The PER law allows this process to continue without disruption. Slightly over half of the respondents to the PER survey, however, indicated that their district had nothing even somewhat similar to the PER process before this legislation was implemented. For the smaller districts, standardized norm-referenced achievement testing was usually the only evaluation carried out. And little instructional use was made of test results. They were, and still are, "testing for testing's sake", in Jack Merwin's phrase (1975). The PER legislation encourages districts to review their testing programs in relation to their stated educational goals.

For the State government, the greatest advantage is probably financial. The burden of constructing or purchasing, and administering evaluative measures is borne by the local districts.

The flexibility/adaptability of the PER legislation means that the State does not have to weigh the desires and needs of the various types of districts and judge their relative importance. It can help each district to work out

evaluation processes to meet its own needs.

For those charged with helping maintain the highest possible standards of education in the State, the PER law is an asset, because it obliges districts to do what they should have been doing all along: To state goals, plan for achievement of those goals, evaluate progress, and report to their constituency. As Joan Baratz (1979, p.16) has stated:

> A system that sets standards must be a fluid one. It must ultimately be able to demonstrate that every reasonable effort has been made to provide children with the opportunity to learn. Setting standards for children means setting standards for the educational system. The system must be able to demonstrate that it is responsible for the educational progress of children and that it acts upon the information it gathers through testing to achieve the standards that it has set.

While Dr. Baratz was referring to state educational systems, the statement applies to the individual district as well.

Disadvantages

For the local district, the PER process created certain problems, primarily the extra burden placed upon already strained resources. Even districts where planning, evaluating, and reporting was already taking place had the added responsibility of reporting to the State as to the form of their compliance with the law. To the extent these functions were not being carried out, additional time and effort were required.

Simply understanding the law's requirements was clearly a problem for most districts. Interpretations of the wording varied. Communication from the State Department to the superinterdent to the PER committee representive sometimes resulted in distortions, counfounded by newspaper reports and even speeches by legislators. It has been mentioned that the MDE perceived its role as that of minimal involvement with the process. Therefore, during the first year, no standardized written checklist of requirement was made available to each district. Turnover in personnel involved in the local PER process made much of the oral communication ineffective. As the MDE takes a stronger leadership role in the PER process, confusion is diminishing.

Only the largest districts in the State have personnel with training and experience in measurement and evaluation. PER committees in smaller districts were often either intimidated by the law's requirements or at a loss as to how to comply with them. This disadvantage is gradually being overcome through training of local and regional PER representatives and the preparation of simple written guidelines and suggestions for various evaluation strategies and reporting techniques.

From the point of view of the State as a whole, the primary disadvantage of this law as opposed to the setting of minimum competency standards is that a high school diploma or graduation from elementary school may mean very different things in different parts of the state. One would have to be familiar with the local scene to assess the meaning of these educational milestones.

Further, the establishment of local minimum competency standards is encouraged, but not mandated. As a result, even within a district there may be no assurance that a graduate meets any performance standards at all. To date, a small proportion of districts have established standards other than attendance and credit hours.

Leaving evaluation up to the local districts means that the quality of evaluation may vary widely across districts. Survey results may be badly biased, ambiguous questions asked, or inappropriate or unreliable measures employed, resulting in inaccurate information. Evaluation seems to be test-oriented and tests may be used which bear only a remote relationship to the district's stated educational goals.

The variety of evaluation techniques used makes impossible the aggregation of data across the State. Annual statewide testing might provide some information not now available as to overall performance and for comparing performance across districts, regions, school district size, etc. However, Minnesota does have a Statewide Assessment, patterned after the National Assessment, which provides this type of information.

A potentially serious limitation of this legislation is its lack of sanctions. Districts can take the law lightly or ignore it completely. Only public pressure ensures compliance. Thus far, most districts appear to feel the legislation is useful to them, or at least is preferable to what might have been passed, so compliance is general.

Some outcomes of this legislation may be viewed either as advantages or disadvantages, depending upon one's point of view. It appears that the law has spurred a renewed emphasis on the basics. Many districts have greatly increased the writing requirements for students (Galligan, 1980). There appears to have been an increased emphasis on discipline in the classroom and throughout the school (ibid.) The legislation appears to have effectively silenced the demand for statewide minimum competency standards. Districts are now requesting help from the MDE and from regional staff, and these people are assuming more of a leadership role in providing guidance and resource materials.

Local districts perceive that they are expected to make this planning process work, or the legislature will take away their local discretion (Mazzoni and Mueller, 1980). State Board of Education policy encourages establishment of minimum competency standards.

But such standards are only a small part of what is required for local school districts to function effectively. The PER legislation is designed to address the whole of instructional planning. It allows each district to move towards its own goals in ways appropriate to its own resources. It will be the function of the MDE and regional staff to help them accomplish what they set out to do.

Future Prospects

A Governor's Task Force on Educational Policy (1981) has recommended that the PER law be incorporated into new legislation requiring annual long-range local and area planning, including enrollment, staffing and revenue projections and exploration of alternative organizational patterns and inter-district cooperation. In connection with this recommendation, the MDE is preparing

recommendations for changes in the PER legislation to clarify and simplify its requirements. Minimum competency standards are not included in the recommendations. There appears to be no demand for such standards. The concern today in Minnesota appears to be for maintaining its relatively high standards in the face of declining enrollment and sharply rising costs.

Conclusions

What does the Minnesota experience suggest that might be helpful for other states' educational leadership? Four items come to mind.

The impetus behind Minnesota's PER law come from a combination of forces; declining test scores was only one of these. Others were declining enrollment and rising costs. School districts throughout the country are faced with these forces, and a review of local district goals and priorities seems a productive response. State Departments of Education can encourage such activities at the local level, and assist with materials and strategies.

If Minnesota schools are typical, there is a great deal of testing going on which is neither very closely related to stated educational goals nor used very well for instructional purposes. SEA measurement and evaluation staff can perform a very useful service in helping districts to tailor their testing to their goals, to use curriculum-related, criterion-referenced tests, to improve their communication of test results to parents and community, and often, to make much better use of test information for program decision-making.

Providing a vehicle for constructive community participation in goal-setting and prioritizing did a great deal to quiet the most vocal critics of Minnesota schools. The annual "consumer evaluation", with publication of results has also had good public relations effects. Citizens became more aware of the range of demands made upon schools, and the necessity for making choices. SEA staff can encourage similar citizen participation and suggest strategies and guidelines for making such activities productive.

A strong lesson to be learned from the Minnesota experience is that when states mandate that LEAs perform rather sophisticated planning and evaluations, a tremendous amount of assistance should accompany the mandate. Districts whose limited resources are already stretched too thin, often lacking any personnel trained in planning or evaluation, were simply overwhelmed by the mandate. SEA staff can do much to "de-mystify" and put into practical terms the basic principles and strategies of planning and evaluation. Districts need help in expanding their concept of evaluation beyond standardized testing; they need help in reliably, validly and economically measuring attitudes and opinions of students, parents, and community; they need suggestions as to how to make use of data already available (e.g., records) in their evaluations; they need help in reporting data clearly, accurately, and concisely.

On the whole, the authors believe the PER law has served Minnesota schools well. Proposed revisions in the law and increased service from SEA and regional staff should improve LEA planning, evaluation and accountability to the public in the future.

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